Celebrating the Lord's Day

On Sunday, we gather as the Body of Christ to celebrate the Lord's Day, the day of Christ's Resurrection:

> As "the first day of the week" (Mk 16:2) it recalls the first creation; and as the "eighth day," which follows the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by the Resurrection of Christ. Thus, it has become for Christians the first of all days and of all feasts. It is the *day of the Lord* in which he with his Passover fulfilled the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and proclaimed man's eternal rest in God. (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 452)

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus rose on the first day of the week—the day following the Jewish Sabbath. Shortly after daybreak, the women found the tomb empty and Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus' death and Resurrection opened for us the doors of salvation. Sharing in Jesus' death in Baptism, we hope to share in his Resurrection. We become a new creation in Christ. It is that new creation which we celebrate on Sunday:

> This is the day the Lord has made;
> let us rejoice in it and be glad. (Ps 118:24)

Each Sunday is a "little Easter"—a celebration of the central mysteries of our faith.

THE SUNDAY EUCHARIST

The primary way in which we celebrate the Lord's Day is with our participation in the Sunday Eucharist. What better way to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord than by celebration of the memorial of his Passion, death, and Resurrection?

This celebration is not a solitary, private event. Instead, we come together as the People of God, the Church, to worship with one heart and one voice. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that "participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church" (CCC, no. 2182).

When members of our church community are absent from this gathering, they are missed. No member of the faithful should be absent from the Sunday Eucharist without a serious reason. The Liturgy should be the first thing on Sunday's schedule, not the last. We should arrive on time, prepared in mind and heart to fully participate in the Mass. Those who cannot attend because of illness or the need to care for infants or the sick deserve our prayers and special attention.

Often, people will suggest that going to Sunday Mass is not necessary. After all, they can pray at home just as well. This has clearly been an issue in the Church for more than a millennium. In the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom addressed this problem directly:

> You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests. (CCC, no. 2179, quoting St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili* 3, 6: PG 48, 725)

Private prayer, though essential to the spiritual life, can never replace the celebration of the eucharistic Liturgy and the reception of Holy Communion.

In some communities, the lack of priests makes it impossible to celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday. In such instances, the bishop may make provision for these parish communities to gather and celebrate the Liturgy of the Word or the Liturgy of the Hours. These Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest may or may not include the reception of Holy Communion. Still, these celebrations allow the People of God to gather and keep holy the Lord's Day.

KEEPING SUNDAY—ALL DAY

Celebrating the Sunday Eucharist—though central and essential—does not complete our observance of Sunday. In addition to attending Mass each Sunday, we should also refrain "from those activities which impede the worship of God and disturb the joy proper to the day of the Lord or the necessary relaxation of mind and body" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 453).

Sunday has traditionally been a day of rest. However, the concept of a day of rest may seem odd in a world that runs 24/7, where we are tethered to our jobs by a variety of electronic gadgets, where businesses run as normal no matter what the day of the week, and where silence seems to be an endangered species. By taking a day each week to rest in the Lord, we provide a living example to the culture that all time belongs to God and that people are more important than things.

As Pope John Paul II said in *Dies Domini* (T*he Day of the Lord*), his apostolic letter on Sunday:

> Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature—too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself—can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full. (*Dies Domini*, no. 67)

Not everyone has the freedom to take Sundays away from work. Some people, including medical professionals and public safety workers, must work on Sundays to keep the rest of us safe and healthy. Others must work for economic reasons beyond their control.

Resting on Sunday does not mean that we are inactive. Instead,

> Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life. (CCC, no. 2186)

To celebrate the Lord's Day more fully, consider trying the following:

- Don't use Sunday as your catch-all day for errands and household chores.
- Share a family dinner after Mass. Have the whole family join in the preparation and cleanup.
- Go for a walk or bike ride and give thanks to God for the beauty of nature.
- Spend time reading the Bible or a spiritual book.
- Pray the Rosary or the Liturgy of the Hours, alone or with others.
- Volunteer in a local food pantry.
- Visit parishioners and others who are homebound.
- Read Bible stories to your children.
- Turn off your gadgets and enjoy the silence.

As we take time each week to celebrate the Paschal Mystery in the Eucharist and to rest from the burdens of our daily lives, we remind ourselves that we are made in the image and likeness of God who "rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken" (Gn 2:2).

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